

10-8-1989

Interview with Martha Cleo Abernathy Tormey (FA 94)

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WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY FOLKLIFE ARCHIVES

INFORMANT/FIELDWORKER DATA FORM

I. INFORMANT

NAME: Martha Cleo (Abernathy) Tormey
(Include fullest possible name & first, middle and/or maiden, last)
(For example: John James Smith; Mary Ann Franklin Smith (Mrs. John))

ADDRESS: 1420 Parker Pl., Brentwood, TN 37027

PERSONAL DATA: Age 56 Date of Birth 12-27-32

Place of Birth Athens, Alabama Sex F

RACE/NATIONALITY/ETHNIC BACKGROUND: Caucasian, Irish, Indian, English

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: (Include education, occupation, places of residence, religious affiliation, etc.)

High School, Bs. College, Homemaker, Alabama, New York
Democrat, Catholic

II. COLLECTOR

NAME: AMANDA Lee DAVIS
(Include fullest possible name as described above)

ADDRESS, LOCAL: 216 Potter Hall WKU B.G. K1 42101

ADDRESS, PERMANENT: 5218 Meadow Lake Rd Brentwood, TN 37027

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE INFORMANT, SUCH AS COUSIN, FRIEND, EMPLOYER, ACQUAINTANCE, ETC.:

friend

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

TAPE INDEX

Tape # 1 of 1

Interviewer: Amanda Davis Address: 216 Potter Hall, WKU,

Interviewee: Martha Tormy Address: 1420 Parker Place, Brentwood, TN

Interviewee: _____ Address: _____
(write additional names on back of sheet)

Place of Interview: MT's home Date: 10/8/89

Equipment Used: Soundesign # 4375B

Tape Brand: _____ Speed: _____

Cassette Brand: BASF 60 or 90 minute? 90

Amount of tape used: Side A: 3/4 Side B: 0

Brief description of contents: Mrs. Tormy tells of her Christmases throughout her life

Comments:

Turn no.	Outline of contents--verbatim material in quotes
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	When did you begin celebrating Christmas?
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	Oh, I would say right after Thanksgiving.
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	How elaborate were your celebrations?
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	Not very elaborate because we didn't have a lot of money being raised way out in the country down in Alabama, so we didn't have a lot of money to spend on Christmas, but the nicest part I remember about Christmas was we would cut our own Christmas tree. There was about three of us, we were all pals and we'd go cut down our own Christmas tree, that was about the nicest thing I remember. I remember us just wacking and wacking and wacking because none of us were strong enough and we'd have that tree cut in all kinds of places because none of us could hit the same spot twice.
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	How did you trim your tree?
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	We had little glass ornaments and popped popcorn. I remember at school popping corn there. We made the little paper chain and put it around the tree. We had a big tree at school and I remember we all had to take it down before we left for the holidays. It was all of us helping. We had a star and it was just a little foil star, but we thought it was great.
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	What kind of tree do you have now?
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	I have a purchased tree and for a while, when we'd first moved to Tennessee, I tried to have a fresh tree and I would put the things the kids made at school on there and we'd string popcorn and do things like that and then we'd have a big tree in the living room for Santa to come to.
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Turn no.	Outline of contents---verbatim material in quotes
	<p>How did you celebrate Christmas Eve?</p> <p>I remember, my Dad, Santa Claus wouldn't bring us the little eats that he brought the other kids, candy and things, but there was this little grocery store down the road and this stands out so vividly in my mind, we had Daddy go out on Christmas Eve to the store and buy lots of nuts and things you didn't have every day and fruit, peppermint candy, and chocolate drops, and he would just put it all down on the floor and to me that was more fun than Christmas to just sit there and eat all you wanted on Christmas Eve.</p>
	<p>When did you open your presents?</p> <p>On Christmas morning as soon as we would get up and see the presents, we'd see them and get up and open them.</p>
	<p>Did you have stockings?</p> <p>No, that was the thing, he would just bring it in a bag and we could eat all we wanted until we went to bed, if we wanted to. That was different I know, I don't know if everybody did that.</p>
	<p>How religious were your Christmases?</p> <p>Average, we went to church. I remember going to a program, I don't know if it was Christmas Eve, but I remember that the Christmas scene was there with Mary, Joseph and baby and it would be younger people in the church, in the little Methodist church.</p>
	<p>How religious are your celebrations now?</p> <p>We got to Mass which is now celebrated around nine o'clock. Many years ago you used to go at midnight, which was difficult you know, but now we usually eat dinner early or have pizza later or something like that for nine o'clock Mass. This is going to be the first year we have a married couple. We have a new bride, so we may have to change our custom and have Christmas over there or here. We've done this the last few years where the kids exchange their gifts to each other on Christmas Eve and we have the big Christmas the next day.</p>
	<p>Did you have any special music, songs or stories told?</p> <p>No, I can't recall any. It was a little low key. There were the songs that are sung and that you should know.</p>
	<p>Do you have a favorite Christmas song?</p> <p>I guess "Silent Night."</p>
	<p>Did you do anything for the community?</p> <p>No, not really I'll tell you because everybody was so poor and people really did for their own family.</p>
	<p>Aside from the candy, any other special childhood memories?</p> <p>I remember, I don't know why he did this, instead of putting the presents under the tree, Dad put them by our beds and I remember your eyes would just be barely open and you'd see these presents.</p>
	<p>Nice way to wake up?</p> <p>Yea, I think that's why he did it, so we'd see it as soon as we woke up.</p>
	<p>Did you believe in Santa Claus?</p> <p>Oh yea, I believed forever it seemed. I received a doll, in fact, I have it there, it's in the rocking chair, I got that</p>

Turn no.	Outline of contents--verbatim material in quotes
	when I was in the fifth grade. How old are you in the fifth grade?
	Ten or eleven?
	Yea, ten or eleven or so, I believed in Santa Claus for a long time. I don't think I wanted to stop believing.
	Do you have a favorite Christmas?
	Yes, I do. It was in New York, that was when I had two children and I was going to take them to Rockefeller Center to see the big Christmas tree. So my husband and I were going to take the kids to see the tree and I was going to take them out to these reindeer at this nursery and we got up early to go and almost as we got there, it started snowing and they had all the Christmas trees for sale and it was like a winter wonderland. It was just beautiful. The snow came and the kids were walking around with the reindeer and soon the ground was covered and the children were so excited and I was excited too because it was really Christmas-y and we went home and then went to Rockefeller Center to see the big Christmas tree
	Did you find Christmases different in the North from the South. I think that at that time they had more preparation. They didn't start so early. We usually didn't put our tree up in New York until Christmas week and we'd take it down January sixth, because I think if you go back in Theology, January sixth was when the wise men came to see the Christ child. So we usually left our tree up until the wise men came and that's what we did up there, but now we take it down the week after Christmas.
	Did you help with any of the baking growing up? Mother had this big trunk and she'd start buying up all of this coconut and things to make a cake and she'd hide them in the trunk and I found it one year and I got into it and made a mess. I remember she'd save the eggs because the hens wouldn't didn't lay as good when the weather was cold.
	Any family recipes? Japanese fruit cake which I do make now. I have not made for a while, but I just inherited by sister's cookbook, but I had some Aunts who made fruit cakes and stuff like that. It was how the women in the country would start baking and saving.
	Is Christmas a family holiday- is this very important? Yea and what amazes me is that the kids would fight with each other all year, but when Christmas came around, then they ask for money to buy each other's gifts and they'd hide it. That's one time they really like each other.
	How difficult was it for you to make a change from growing up in Alabama and belonging to the Methodist church and then getting married, moving to New York and belonging to the Catholic church? No, it wasn't too difficult because I had a small family. It was just me and my sister, so it wasn't like, "Oh, are we going to get to see each other?"
	Any new traditions from your husband's family? Catholic Mass, I know his Mom and Dad were big on having a large Christmas tree and where my family would cut down our

Turn no.	Outline of contents--verbatim material in quotes
	<p>own tree and decorate it. I know we always ate at his, John's Mom and Dad's for Christmas dinner in the afternoon and there would be a lot of laughter and food.</p> <p>What was served at dinner?</p> <p>In New York? Turkey and stuffing, cranberry sauce, pretty much same as the South, but as we got older, his Mom had roast, potatoes and turnips, because his parents are Irish and real country as far as food goes, real bland, fresh food though like beans, potatoes, carrots, pumpkin pie, apple pie, not too big a cake.</p> <p>Do you have a big dinner now?</p> <p>Usually I make what everybody likes to eat. I have some things that don't require too much preparation, but with everybody going around the Christmas tree and opening all their gifts, I got away from the turkey, but I bake coconut cake, apple pie and stuff like that.</p> <p>What's the true meaning of Christmas?</p> <p>Sharing materially speaking and sharing each other.</p> <p>What about all the commercialism?</p> <p>I wish the store didn't start in so early. I think people are trying to keep the Christmas spirit. I remember as a child you wouldn't see things for Christmas in the stores until right before Christmas and everything was so green and exciting, but now you see it right after Halloween. I think it's too commercial.</p> <p>How elaborate are your Christmases now?</p> <p>I decorate, that's one time of year I really go all out.</p> <p>Do you watch any of the holiday movies?</p> <p>Yes, I like the musical shows. Les Paul and Mary Ford, is that it, Les Paul and Mary Ford? Any of those shows on the public television station.</p> <p>Any last thoughts?</p> <p>I wish that people would celebrate Christmas for what it really is and not so much shopping and pressure that you've got to go and buy things and I know some young mothers with young children and you're just exhausted, I know I was.</p> <p>What would you like to pass on to your grandchildren?</p> <p>I have started a little book of Christmas recipes and things I know my children like to have at Christmas. What was your question?</p> <p>How would you like them to remember your Christmases?</p> <p>Remember to love one another, to try to remember what Christmas is all about and like I said it's too commercial and I wish it would be like it was.</p>